

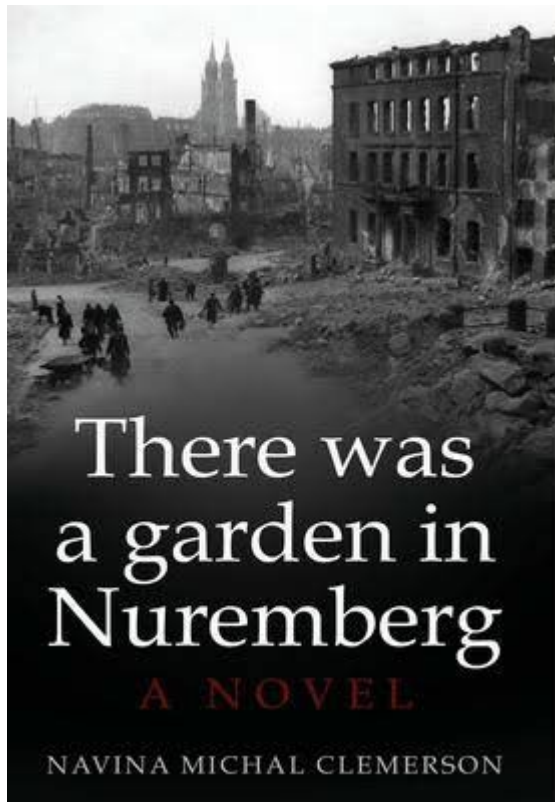
The Khandallah Literary Review

Welcome to the March/April edition of our monthly newsletter.

We'll review books, and some music, which appeal to us. Contributions also come from select library members and staff (basically, anyone who tells us about a Book, Movie or CD they like)

“Avoid social interaction. Always carry a book” (Chalkboard slogan outside The Bookshop) from *Reminders of the Day: A Bookshop Diary* by Shaun Bythell

There was a Garden in Nuremberg by Navina Michal Clemerson (Fiction)



This is so much more than a novel about a Jewish family's ordeal in Nazi Germany, although it succeeds beautifully at just that. It could have been published as nonfiction, based as it is on the author's own family's harrowing experiences. Meticulously researched from documents, archives and eyewitness accounts, Clemerson evokes the comfortable lifestyle of the middle-class Jewish Mannheim family: Walter, a partner in a law firm, Sonia who has transformed an ordinary garden into a beautiful haven, son Max, industrious and serious, daughter Helena, carefree and clumsy. Sonia's garden is eventually their only haven as events unfold as the Jewish population is subjected to indignities and humiliations, and eventually dispossessed of their rights, identity,

and property. Even their citizenship is taken away. For me the novel's greatest achievement is detailing the insidious nature of the plot against the Jews, and the gradual hardening of the hearts of the German people, until even Walter loses hope that evil will not prevail. A book and story worth remembering. Greg

Reminders of the Day: A Bookshop Diary by Shaun Bythell (memoir)



The latest diary, (following on from “Confessions of a Bookseller” and “Seven Kinds of People You Find in Bookshops”) continues the story of the owner, his eccentric (to say the least) staff, and the quirky, demanding customers of Scotland’s largest second-hand bookshop.

Booklovers will rejoice in the tales of literary treasures and biblio-trivia. What shines through once more is the author’s love of books and his slightly irascible affection for those who spend their life reading, buying and collecting them. Bythell’s curmudgeonly charm and wit are at their best with his wry, mostly fond, observations of his customers. A delight. David

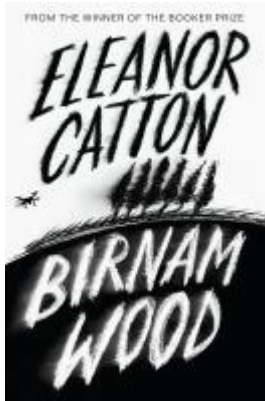
In the Eye of the Wild by Nastassja Martin (Non-Fiction)



Translated from the French, this sometimes funny but horrifying memoir tells the real-life story of this anthropologist whose life alters when she encounters and is “kissed” (her description) by an Arctic Kamchatka bear. She is left alive but with her face and head badly mutilated. What follows is her journey of recovery from this ordeal including Russian then French hospital stays. Neither can be recommended for different reasons – the Russians think she may be a spy, the French need to repeat the operation to fit a replacement jaw plate due to an antibiotic resistant infection the first time. At times

this was darkly funny but also tragic. As she recovers physically, she also feels the need to recover mentally, to understand and come to terms with what has happened to her. In order to do this, she returns to the scene of the attack where her focus is on learning about herself and attempting to free herself of her traumatic memories. She is looked upon by the local “Even” people as “Medka” – half woman half bear. This is a short book and I found it a riveting read. Afterwards, researching Kamchatka bears which are HUGE and retracing her Arctic journey was also fascinating. Jill from Khandallah

Birnam Wood by Eleanor Catton (NZ Fiction)

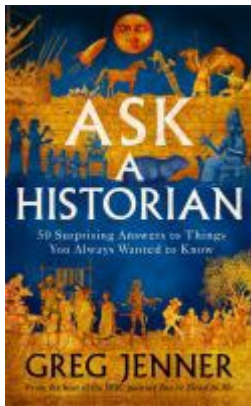


The New Zealand landscape is at the heart of Eleanor Catton's new novel, a tale of people who all see in it different opportunities. After a landslide scuppers the subdivision of a farm in the rural South Island, activist gardening group Birnam Wood seize the chance to expand their operation. But the farm's ownership is caught between a blokey boomer businessman and an unscrupulous American billionaire, and the subsequent clash of values propels the story into dark and thorny places. Birnam Wood is already shaping up to be the biggest NZ book this year, and it deserves all the hype. It's deft, absorbing, and populated with precisely drawn characters, all recognisable types but turned into convincing people through pitch-perfect dialogue and detail. The politics are at once universal and specific to New Zealand - issues like mining in National Parks or bunker-building billionaires buying their way into citizenship are clearly close to home, while the overarching theme of capitalism vs environmentalism is relevant everywhere. The combination of literary craft with the timeliest of issues makes Birnam Wood an essential read that packs a punch. Charlotte

Eleanor Catton's latest book Birnam Wood, is very different from her award winning "The Luminaries ". Much, much shorter. It's a dark eco-thriller, easy to read page turner set in New Zealand, where an American tech billionaire clashes with a small gardening group aka 'guerrilla gardeners' – they tend vacant plots of land around Christchurch in their attempt to be self-sufficient and sustainable. The billionaire appears to be helping them by giving them access to a great piece of land to grow their crops, but it turns out he is mining the land nearby secretly for profit. *"A dark and brilliant novel about the violence and tawdriness of late capitalism. Its ending though propels it from a merely very good book to a truly great one"* says The Guardian. Jill from Khandallah

Another rave for "Birnam Wood' Bridget from Khandallah who said it's *"Beaut, a terrific read!"*

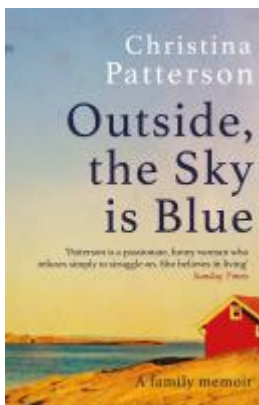
Ask a Historian: 50 Surprising Answers to Things You Always Wanted to Know by Greg Jenner (Non-Fiction)



I'm not sure these are things I've always wanted to know (or even thought of) but they are interesting, nonetheless. The questions are genuine, from an online questionnaire and include When was the first Monday? When and why did we start keeping hamsters as pets? Is it true a dead Pope was put on trial? and Who Invented Maths? The author is an academic who hosts podcasts for the BBC and worked on the TV series Horrible Histories. He writes in an informal chatty style, with humorous quips to entertain as well as inform, with detailed explanations and reasoning.

He's not quite as funny as he thinks he is, but he provides a satisfying dip into snippets of history. Perhaps skip over the question about knights in full armour and the need to go to the toilet. Greg

Outside, the Sky is Blue by Christina Patterson (Biography)



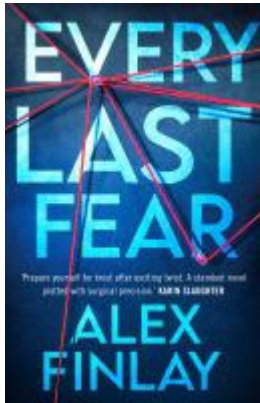
A memoir of growing up in a family living with mental and physical ill health in the 1960s. *'Harrowing in parts, this is an account of an older sister dealing with schizophrenia. Very well written and a good story'*. Neroli from Khandallah

The Man who loved Books: The True Story of a Thief, a Detective and a World of Literary Obsession by Allison Hoover Bartlett (Non-Fiction)



John Gilkey has stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of rare books, not for profit but for love of them. Ken Sanders is the dedicated 'bibliodick' (book dealer, amateur detective) driven to catch him. *"A thief who collected books but didn't read them. If you like stories about books, it's really interesting. I raced through it"* Roman from Ngaio

Every Last Fear by Alex Findlay (Fiction)



There is a lot going on in this thriller – a previous murder, a possible wrongful conviction highlighted by a true crime documentary, more murders and a near death event that might not be an accident. With a brother in prison, Matt Pine has just been told that the rest of his family have been found dead in Mexico. Naturally devastated, and not all convinced of his brother’s innocence, Matt’s only support are his university friends. When connections between the two events appear, they help Matt investigate. They, and the other characters, are well rounded and well written. Alex Findlay, a pseudonym, is an accomplished writer and keeps the plot moving through different timeframes and from different character perspectives. Particularly moving is the sequence in Mexico where you hope for a different outcome for the family. Gripping. Greg

The Artist’s Secret by Alexandra Joel (Fiction)



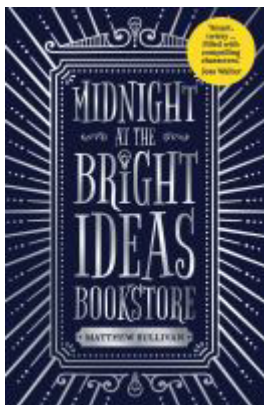
A young woman, raised in a hippie type commune dedicates her life to art. She achieves her dream job as Curator at the Sydney Art Museum but attracts the attention of a jealous male colleague. Even though he assaults her, she has to leave and build her life anew. “A complex and moving story. Anyone who enjoys the art scene will enjoy this”. Christine from Khandallah

Cinema Speculation by Quentin Tarantino (Non-Fiction)



This is the celebrated film director and screenwriter's own intriguing take on classic movies and movie people of the 70s. Interspersed between examinations of the movies, he regales us with his own movie watching experiences when he saw these movies for the first time. The films include Dirty Harry, Joe, Sisters, The Outfit, Daisy Miller, Taxi Driver and Rolling Thunder. Tarantino's thoughtful critiques, insights and conclusions come not from standard interviews from the people involved, but through conversations with them as friends and people he knows personally, people he relates to and they to him. As an Auteur he has an interesting way of looking at films. On an actor in Daisy Miller, he says "*Barry Brown, along with Eileen Brennan, is the most era appropriate actor in the film. He enters the movie like he stepped out of a Chagall painting to start the story, a painting he will return to once the story is over*". As a Cinematographer he praises director Don Siegel "*Yet unlike Leone, Peckinpah, Hyams and De Palma, Siegel never engaged in cinematic set pieces, until the beautiful practically wordless opening sequence of Escape from Alcatraz*". The author segues to thoughts on directors – New Wave - Post 60s – Movie Brats, a favourite film critic and the death of Bela Lugosi, but for me the most interesting aspects were the what ifs? What would happen if this director had filmed it instead, or if this actor was in that role instead. It makes me want to watch all these movies all over again. Greg

Midnight at the Bright Ideas Bookstore by Matthew J Sullivan (Fiction)



When a bookshop patron commits suicide in the shop, it's down to Lydia, his favourite bookseller to unravel the puzzle surrounding his death. Plenty of searching and suspense before all is revealed including Lydia's mysterious, violent and traumatic past. This was a recent book club read for me and was enjoyed by the group for its quirkiness. Entertaining but also disturbing. Jill from Khandallah

Decision to Leave directed by Park Chan-wook (DVD)



Decision to Leave is the latest film by Korean director Park Chan-wook, and though it has the trappings of a crime drama, it's a moody romance at heart. Detective Hae-jun works murder cases in Busan. His investigation of an apparent suicide is derailed by his fascination with Seo-Rae, the deceased's wife. Her lack of apparent grief strikes him as odd, and soon he's drawn into her life. The movie is not particularly interested in the crime itself. It lingers instead on late-night encounters, shared food, insomnia and mistranslations, the slow-burn build of the central relationship. There's stunning scenery too, the urban setting often overshadowed by the mountains and the sea as the investigation becomes secondary to the characters'

emotional lives. Delicately balanced and beautifully shot, Decision to Leave is utterly captivating and well worth a watch. Charlotte